



NEWS

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MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION COMMISSION APPROVES \$14.7 MILLION TO ACQUIRE LANDS FOR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission has approved more than \$14 million to expand the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Nation's most unique collection of lands and waters set aside specifically for fish and wildlife.

The cabinet-level Congressional commission, chaired by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, approved the funds at its September 15 meeting in Washington, DC. The money will be used to acquire more than 19,000 acres for 14 national wildlife refuges around the country.

Many of the land acquisitions were approved for refuges along one of the migratory waterfowl "flyways," four major travel corridors that migratory birds follow on spring and fall migrations.

"The funds approved by the Conservation Commission will benefit waterfowl and a variety of other migratory birds by ensuring vital nesting, breeding, feeding and resting places are preserved on our national wildlife refuges," said Jamie Rappaport Clark, director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the refuge system. "And because refuges are the perfect places to witness the spectacular migration of millions of these feathered beauties, these funds are ultimately a boon to people, as well."

These refuge acquisitions are financed by the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, including revenue collected from Federal Duck Stamp sales to hunters, stamp collectors, and other conservationists; appropriations; import duties collected on arms and ammunition; and receipts from national wildlife refuge entrance fees.

New National Wildlife Refuge System Acquisitions

Currituck NWR in northeastern North Carolina will gain 684 acres for the benefit of a variety of wetland-dependent birds. Black ducks, mallards, snow and Canada geese, and American coots use the refuge as wintering grounds and the new acquisition will provide a significant increase in nesting and feeding habitat for these species.

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The commission approved funding to acquire 34 acres of wetlands for the Barnegat Division of **Edwin B. Forsythe NWR near Atlantic City, New Jersey**. The refuge provides vital breeding habitat, food, cover, travel corridors and wintering habitat for waterfowl such as Atlantic brant and American black duck which use the Atlantic Flyway.

On the eastern shore of Virginia, Fisherman Island NWR will increase by 825 acres, protecting critical migration, breeding and wintering habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors. The refuge functions as a critical staging area for large concentrations of these birds during fall migration. Species using Fisherman Island NWR include blue-winged teal, mallards, American wigeon, mergansers and sea ducks. The area also supports large numbers of colonial nesting waterbirds, fin fish and shellfish.

Acquisition of more than 1,800 acres was approved for **Great Dismal Swamp NWR in southeastern Virginia**, protecting large contiguous blocks of wetland forest for waterfowl and neotropical migratory birds. The area provides nesting and brood habitat for wood ducks, and feeding and nesting habitat for Canada geese and other migratory waterfowl.

Black ducks, wood ducks, mallards and Canada geese will benefit from the acquisition of 98 acres at **Great Meadows NWR near Boston**. The refuge is comprised mainly of freshwater wetlands, providing nesting habitat for ducks and geese and resting and feeding habitat for a variety of waterfowl during migration. Bald eagles and peregrine falcons also use the refuge for short durations during migration.

Great White Heron NWR, part of the Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuge Complex in southern Florida, will gain 90 acres of critical feeding and resting ground for migrating waterfowl. Established in 1938 as a refuge and breeding ground for the great white heron and other migratory birds and wildlife, Great White Heron NWR hosts populations of green- and blue-winged teal, red-breasted mergansers and coots and provides prime habitat for nesting and wintering populations of marsh and water birds, shorebirds, doves and predatory birds.

The commission approved the acquisition of more than 12,000 acres of wetlands at **Laguna Atascosa NWR in southeastern Texas**. The area to be acquired is part of a wetland complex providing wintering, migration, and resident habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, neotropical migratory birds and other wetland-dependent wildlife. The new acquisition also is prime wintering habitat for a significant portion of North America's redhead duck population.

In upstate New York, Montezuma NWR will gain 224 acres. The refuge provides critical nesting, feeding and resting habitat and hosts a large number of waterfowl year-round. In the fall, it hosts some 50,000 Canada geese and approximately 100,000 mallards and 10,000 black ducks. Some 1,500 ducks and geese are produced annually on Montezuma refuge.

Moosehorn NWR in eastern Maine, which provides vital breeding habitat, food, cover, travel corridors and wintering habitat for waterfowl on the Atlantic Flyway, will gain 140 acres. The area around the new acquisition supports the highest nesting density of bald eagles in the northeastern United States and is considered essential to the continuing recovery of bald eagles in the East.

More than 100 acres of wetlands will be added to **Overflow NWR in southern Arkansas**. The area to be acquired provides exceptional habitat for large numbers of mallards and wood ducks. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan has identified the refuge as an important acquisition site in Arkansas.

Forty acres will be added to **Rachel Carson NWR in southern coastal Maine**, increasing important wintering and migration habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. During harsh winters, the marshes to be acquired provide a vital food and cover resource for migrating birds at a time when inland waters are frozen and unusable.

Mallards and wood ducks will be among the beneficiaries as **Savannah NWR** acquires more than 500 acres of bottomland hardwood and wetland habitat **in southeastern South Carolina**. Established in 1927, Savannah provides valuable feeding and resting places for migratory birds. It is an important feeding and roosting site for wintering waterfowl as well as nesting and brood-rearing area for wood ducks.

Stewart B. McKinney NWR in coastal Connecticut will grow by 8 acres. The new acquisition will provide migration and wintering habitat for waterfowl such as black ducks, mallards, blue-winged teal, Canada geese and buffleheads.

Wintering areas vital to the long-term conservation of migratory waterfowl will be protected as **White River NWR in eastern Arkansas** acquires more than 1,800 acres. The refuge preserves and protects habitat for wintering waterfowl and other migratory birds and also supports species such as neotropical migratory birds.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission

With passage of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act in 1929, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission was established to approve land acquisitions from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund for the National Wildlife Refuge System that are considered important to waterfowl.

Since its inception, the commission has approved more than 4.5 million acres of land acquisitions for the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System.

The commission's responsibilities increased significantly with passage of the North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989, which provides funding to encourage partnerships to protect, enhance and

restore wetlands and other habitats for migratory birds and wildlife in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

These wetlands conservation projects are financed by the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, made up of appropriations; fines, penalties, and forfeitures under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act; and interest accrued on the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Fund administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The commission meets three times each year to review proposals for refuge acquisitions and wetlands conservation projects.

Members of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission are the Secretary of the Interior, who serves as chairman; two members of the U.S. Senate (John Breau and Thad Cochran); two members of the U.S. House of Representatives (John Dingell and Curt Weldon); the Secretary of Agriculture; and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

The commission was established largely in response to public concern over plummeting waterfowl populations during the "Dust Bowl" days of the 1920s and 30s, reflecting the National Wildlife Refuge System's early commitment to waterfowl protection.

While its importance to waterfowl remains, the refuge system today hosts a variety of habitats supporting all kinds of wildlife, including many of the Nation's endangered species, big game animals such as buffalo and elk, prairie wildflowers and cypress forests, trophy trout and tiny butterflies.

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the 95-year-old National Wildlife Refuge System is now made up of 514 refuges and 38 wetland management districts in all 50 states and U.S. territories. More than 30 million people annually visit refuges for a variety of recreational activities, such as birdwatching, fishing, hunting, and nature photography, while hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren visit refuges each year to learn about nature and the environment.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. In addition to the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Service also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.